DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 916 CG 019 724

AUTHOR Champagne, Delight E.
TITLE Planning Developmental Interventions for Adult Students.
PUB DATE 16 Mar 87
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American College Personnel Association/National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Chicago, IL, March 15-18, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Development; *Adult Students; *College Students; *Delivery Systems; *Developmental Programs; Higher Education; Midlife Transitions; *Nontraditional Students; Social Support Groups; Student Characteristics; Student Needs; *Student Personnel Services

ABSTRACT

Student affairs professionals have come to realize that the student body on college campuses is changing. Adult students are filling the spaces left vacant by a diminishing traditional-aged student population. Interventions in student affairs, however, are often targeted for the specific developmental tasks of the traditional student. Student affairs professionals need to give greater consideration to the developmental needs of adult learners. Adult learners have a common need for interventions which focus on the transition process. To provide services to adult students, student affairs professionals need a knowledge base of current literature on adult transitions. In addition, a distinction should be made between a developmental model and a medical model as the foundation for establishing intervention goals for the adult learner who is in transition. New systems of service delivery are required to meet the needs of the growing college population of older students. Service delivery areas important in meeting the needs of older students include specialized services, advocacy, referral, networking and mentoring, education, provision of a clearinghouse linking students to campus services, program planning, and counseling. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED279916

Planning Developmental Interventions for Adult Students

Delight E. Champagne
Assistant Professor
Springfield College

CG 019724

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Delight E. Champagne

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presentation at the ACPA/NASPA Conference
Chicago, IL
March 16, 1987

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Planning Developmental Interventions for Adult Students

For the past fifty years, our profession has held the point of view that student development should be the focus of our interventions. In the wake of the Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937), academic literature has emphasized a developmental perspective which deals primarily with traditional-aged college students and their developmental concerns. Increasingly, however, student affairs professionals have come to realize that the student body on our college campuses is changing. Baby boomers and older adults are filling the spaces left vacant by a diminishing traditional-aged student population.

Developmentally, traditional and non-traditional students have one thing in common. They are both groups of people who are at a transition point in their lives. Adult students report that a transition in their lives is the major trigger for their learning (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). The transition from adolescence to young adulthood occupies the 18-22 year old

life phase. While the developmental tasks of each may differ, the transition process may hold some similarities. Quite often, however, our interventions in student affairs have been targeted for the specific developmental tasks of the traditional student.

This paper suggests that student affairs professionals need to give greater consideration to the developmental needs of adult learners. In particular, it proposes that: (1) adult learners have a common need for interventions which focus on the transition process; (2) a distinction should be made between a developmental model and a medical model as the foundation for establishing intervention goals for the adult learner who is in transition; (3) a knowledge base of current literature on adult transitions is needed by professionals who are increasingly challenged by adults on their campuses; (4) new systems of service delivery are required to meet the needs of this growing college population.

The Adult Transition

Adulthood is characterized by both stability

and change (Gergen,1970). Transitions in adulthood provide adults with opportunities for growthful change or deterioration (Schlossberg, 1981; Danish, 1981). They can also be times of stress (Pearlin, 1980), crisis (Sheehy, 1976), or excitement (Danish, 1981). A transition can be viewed as "a period of moving from one state of certainty to another, with an interval of uncertainty and change in between" (Sherman, 1984).

According to Schlossberg (1981), a transition is said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in one´s assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one´s behavior and relationships. Transitions involve a process of continuing and changing reactions over time in which individuals continuously appraise themselves and the meaning of the transitional event (Kegan, 1982; Sherman, 1987; Schlossberg, 1984). Meaning- making is a major theme of adult transitions, particularly during mid-life (Sherman, 1987; Kegan, 1982). During a transition, a person moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to finally integrating the transition into his or her life

(Schlossberg, 1984).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Life events can serve both as markers and processes which signal a transition (Danish, Smyer, & Nowak, 1980). Danish et al. note that characteristics of the event such as event timing, duration, sequencing, cohort specificity, contextual purity, and probability of occurrence have bearing on the impact of the event. Schlossberg (1981) includes additional characteristics of the event which have an impact on the adult such as whether the transition signifies a role change which is a gain or loss, has positive or negative affect, or comes from an internal or external source. Such characteristics make transitions become very complex events for adults. Adaptation can therefore be a great challenge for adult learners who seek our services.

Adaptation To Change in Adulthood

Before introducing the concept of intervention in adult transitions, some view of how adults adapt

to change without professional interventions is also needed. Hopson (1981), for example, has observed that some people see some transitions as events to be resisted at all costs. Knox (1977) has made a similar observation and also proposes that there are at least six ways in which adults adapt to significant change events: frantic activity, action, educative activity, seeking assistance, contemplation, and withdrawal. These authors are discussing behavioral responses to change.

Some authors, on the other hand, prefer to focus more on the emotional impact of the change. Brammer and Abrego (1981) and Peter Marris (1974) identify grief stages similar to those of Kubler Ross (1969) in discussing how adults deal effectively with transition. A seven stage model presented by Brammer and Abrego includes the stages of shock and immobilization, denial, depression, letting go, searching for meaning, and integration. Marris' model is quite similar. He specifically stresses the idea, however, that feelings of loss are associated with all changes in life and that ambivalence is a primary feeling

as well.

Albrect and Gift (1980) have examined the role of ambiguity in making the experience of transition difficult for the adult. They contend that ambiguous situations and events for which there is no preparation and which have conflicting or unclear expectations can become crises. Thus, if we give recognition to their contentions, adaptation is further hampered by the ambiguity of the transitional situation.

Schlossberg (1981) and Danish et al. (1980) place emphasis on the characteristics of the life event as contributing to how one responds to the change event. Schlossberg (1984) also notes that the individual's ability to adapt to a transition depends on his or her balance of assets and liabilities in the area of coping resources. Support is seen as a critical asset in the transition process. Danish et al. (1980) suggest that the impact of critical life events may be altered by the quality of the support system available to the individual. They further note that a number of studies have pointed out the importance of supportive networks and

interpersonal resources for individuals experiencing critical life events. Returning adult students report that support is important to their learning experience (Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986) and that it helps to combat depression when they are faced with negative life events as they reenter college (Roehl & Okun, 1984).

Rationale and Goals for the Intervention Process

Intervention, at the very least then, can be viewed as a potential support for the transitional adult and as an opportunity to minimize ambiguity by providing learning experiences which foster the adult's awareness of what might be expected before, during, and after the transitional event. It may further serve as a resource for expanding one's awareness of oneself, one's values, dreams, and choices. Depending on how one views transition and the adaptation process, it may also provide the opportunity for learning coping skills to deal with the transitional stress, or it may give the adult the chance to make anticipatory preparation for the transition so that stress may

be reduced.

Danish et al. (1980) make a fine distinction between the enhancement and prevention approaches to intervening in adult development, a distinction which is useful in developing goals for transition intervention. He refers to the enhancement approach as being the developmental viewpoint and the prevention approach as stemming from the mental health model.

For the developmentalist, the emphasis is on growth and the intervention occurring during the life event are ones of support for the adult, while those which are made after the event are considered to be of a counseling nature. In the mental health model, however, the emphasis is on coping with the stress of the event and adapting to it. The individual's coping behavior is evaluated on a continuum of mental health to mental illness. In this model, one attempts to prevent or remediate distress associated with change. Brammer and Abrego (1981), Pearlin (1980), and Hansen (1981) are representative proponents of this model.

The enhancement approach is one from which

the majority of adult students could potentially benefit, particularly in relation to somewhat predictable life events. It is also an approach which is consistent with the student development foundation of the student affairs profession. Kagan(1980) has noted that in enhancement, a particular psychological structure or process becomes better articulated or a process more efficient, but the essential nature of the psychological quality remains unchanged.

Thus, the developmental model appears to be particularly useful in developing goals for intervention in predictable life events and transitions especially at midlife. It does, however, downplay the stress associated with the transition, whether predictable or not. Brammer and Abrego (1981), on the other hand, emphasize the stress associated with the transition and the skills one needs in order to "cope" with it. They suggest that "in the process of coping with life threatening change, a person can learn how to manage future transitions. In addition, the change sets in motion a renewal process characterized by new life goals and directions."

They further comment that there is a difference between adapting to change in a adjustive sense and actualizing oneself in the process of coping with that change.

As service providers who are committed to the growth and development of all students, student affairs professionals have the opportunity to establish goals for their interventions with adult students which may include: (1) providing support and reducing stress during the transitional event, (2) providing counseling services to adult students who have already undergone a transitional event, (3) enhancing the growth of adult students by providing services before transitional events have occurred. (See Figure 2)

Insert Figure 2 about here

Planning for Service Delivery to Adult Students

In order for the goals of the developmental interventions to be achieved, student affairs professionals need to create new methods of service delivery appropriate for adult students. Eight

service delivery areas can be considered important in meeting these goals (see figure 3).

The first area encompasses all existing student affairs offices and departments. In this area, developmental intervention goals could be met by providing staff with information about adult development, by rethinking essential services in light of the information on adulthood, and by adapting existing services to better conform to the needs of adult students. For example, career planning services could be offered during times more appropriate for adults or special workshops on mid-life career change could be arranged. Admissions and financial aid forms could be modified.

All personnel should recognize ambivalence as part of the transitional process, rather than as a sign of a lack of developmental readiness to be in college. Adults, therefore, would be supported during every encounter with student affairs staff. Staff development would be required then, to educate professionals in these areas. Linkages with offices which deal with non-traditional students, such as continuing education, graduate departments, and women's studies programs should be firmly established.

Women's centers should be strengthened in recognition of the large percentage of female adult students.

Insert Figure 3 about here

A second functional area would be that of educating adult students about the transition process, about adult development and learning, and about the college experience. Ideally, this could be accomplished through a credit course, not unlike the "University 101" course offered to entering freshmen on some campuses.

Being an advocate for adult students on the college campus would be a third functional role for student affairs professionals. In speaking out on behalf of adult learners, professionals can often break through the "red tape" encountered by adults on our campuses. The adequacy of child care services, facility operating hours, commuter parking, academic advisement, and registration procedures are more easily challenged by many workers within the system than by a few students who view themselves as being outside the system. A task force and advocacy team can be created with representatives from student affairs, continuing

education, academic affairs, and the adult student population.

A fourth functional role in service delivery for adult students would be to serve as a clearinghou se for needed services for adult students, linking them to the appropriate office or agency which can best meet their needs. Closely aligned to this functional area is a fifth area, that of referral when existing services on the college campus do not meet the developmental needs of the student. Community agencies, for example, frequently offer support groups for widows and widowers, the newly divorced, and recovering alcoholics. Small campuses, with limited services should strengthen their referral sources.

In some cases, additional program planning can be arranged to meet the needs of adult students on college campuses. This sixth functional area includes the planning of such activities as support groups, workshops, speakers, brown bag lunches, and family activities which assist adults with specific transitions such as the reentry into the job market after a number of years at home. Vivian McCoy (1977) has developed an expansive list of

programs which could be offered during specific life phases. These can include dual career workshops, multiple role workshop, mid-life career change workshops, and retirement seminars to name a few. These programs focus on the context or nature of the transition rather than on the transition process. They are most appropriate for providing support when the life event is occurring.

Networking and mentoring, on the other hand, empower students with the skills needed to face any transition. In this seventh functional area, Students can be aided in analyzing their existing support networks, in meeting new people in their professional fields, in finding resources, and in learning skills necessary for creating their own personal and professional support networks. The student affairs professional has the opportunity to serve as a mentor or role model in this area.

A final functional role for service delivery is that of counseling. Adult counseling services, peer counseling programs, and outreach are essential to the success of service delivery to adults in this area. In the developmental intervention model, these services would be most

appropriate after the transitional event has occurred and when the individual is having difficulty adapting to the transition.

It is clear from this model of functional roles that student affairs can play a major role in the provision of services for adult students. Since student affairs is the one campus division which cuts across all existing services, it has the power and the obligation to play such a primary role.

REFERENCES

Albrecht, G. & Gift, H. (1975). Adult socialization: Ambiguity and adult life crises. In Datan & Ginsberg, Life span developmental psychology: Normative life crises. New York: Academic Press.

American Council on Education. (1937). The Student Personnel Point of View. American Council on Education Studies, Series 1, Vol. 1, No. 3. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

Aslanian, C. & Brickell, H. (1980). Americans in Transition: Life changes as reasons for adult learning.
New York: College Board.

Brammer, L. & Abrego, P. (1981). Intervention strategies for coping with transitions. The Counseling Psychologist, 9, 19-36.

Danish, S. (1981). Life-span human development and intervention: A necessary link. The Counseling Psychologist, 9, 40-43.

Danish, S., Smyer, M., & Nowak, C. (1980). Developmental intervention: Enhancing life-event processes. In Baltes & Brim, Life-span development & behavior, Volume 3. New York: Academic Press.

Hansen, F. (1981). Primary prevention and counseling psychology. The Counseling Psychologist, 9, 57-60.

Huston-Hoburg, L. & Strange, C. (1986). Spouse support among male and female returning adult students. Journal of College Student Personnel, 27, 388-394.

Kagan, J. (1980). Perspectives on continuity. In Brim & Kagan, Constancy and change in human development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. (1982). The evolving self. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Knox, A. (1977). Adult development and learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Marris, P. (1974). Loss and change. New York: Pantheon Books.

Pearlin, L. (1980). Life-strains and psychological distress among adults. In Smelser & Erikson, Themes of work and love in adulthood. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roehl, J. & Okun, M. (1984). Depression symptoms among women reentering college: The role of negative life events and family social support. Journal of College Student Personnel, 25, 251-254.

Schlossberg, N. (1984). Counseling adults in transition. New York: Springer.

Schlossberg, N. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. The Counseling Psychologist, 9, 2-17.

Sheehy, G. (1976). Passages: Predictable crises of adult life. Toronto: Bantam Books.

Sherman, E. (1987). Meaning in mid-life transitions. New York: State University of New York Press.

Figure 1

The Transitional Process of Adult Learners

Figure 2

Planning Developmental Interventions
for Adult Students

Developmental Purpose	Intervention Timing	Intervention goals
Enhancement	Interventions used before the life event has occurred	-Self exploration & awareness -Education -Skills Training -Career & life Planing -Preparation for academic life -Understanding of adult transitions
Support	Interventions used during the course of the life event	-Group support for specific developmental tasks -Development of a personal support network -Mentoring & role modeling -Advocacy -Linking
Counseling	Interventions used after the life event has occurred	-Remediation -Reduction of stress -Assessment & action planning -Individual counseling -Peer counseling -Group counseling -Referral

*Adapted from Danish et al. (1981)

Figure 3

Developmental Intervention

Functional Areas of the Student Affairs Staff

Specialized Services
- Adaptations for adult needs
- Staff awareness of adult development

Education
- Provide information about adult development, transitions, the college experience
- Life skills training

Advocacy
- Speak on behalf of adults on campus
- Develop task force

Clearinghouse
- Link students to campus services
- prepare a resource file

Referral
- Link adult students to community agencies
- Direct students to other educational institutions and resources

Program Planning
- Plan workshops, speakers activities appropriate for adults
- Develop support groups

Networking & Mentoring
- Assess & develop student support system
- Serve as role models

Counseling
- Provide individual, group and peer counseling support specifically for adults
- Use outreach mechanisms